

Policing Public Morality in Modern Muslim Societies: ‘Religious Police’ in Saudi Arabia, ‘Islamic State’ and Aceh

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I. Introduction

Across many different regions of the world and periods of history, one can find countless examples of thinkers and political forces calling for the imposition of ‘Islamic rule’ or the formation of an ‘Islamic society.’ From the medieval jurist Ṭaqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymīya (1263–1328) to the Muslim Brotherhood that emerged in 20th-century Egypt, to the Islamic militants of today, the examples are diverse and far-ranging. However, they all have one thing in common: they tout the slogan of ‘*sharī’a*-compliant rule.’ But the question that we must carefully consider is: what exactly do they mean by ‘*sharī’a*-compliant rule’?

In Islam, *sharī’a* refers to those precepts of the Islamic sources: the holy *Qur’ān* and *Sunna*, custom and practice based on the verbally transmitted record of deeds and sayings of prophet Muḥammad (570?–632), that concern daily life, whereas *fiqh* describes the process of deriving specific rulings from such precepts. However, in Western languages, both *sharī’a* and *fiqh* are sometimes expressed by the term ‘Islamic law’. Consequently, *sharī’a* tends to be classified as a type of man-made (as opposed to divine) law, making it no different from what we would generally recognise as ‘national law’ (a body of laws prescribed by a modern nation-state). Under such classification, ‘*sharī’a*-compliant rule’ would presumably mean a situation in which a nation-state has instituted a body of national laws that favours Islamic values. This article does not directly concern itself with how *sharī’a* is understood and framed around the world today, or how the

modern state and Islam are related. However, it does discuss these matters insofar as they relate to the forces that are currently seeking to establish *sharī’a*-compliant government.

In this article, I use the phrase ‘*sharī’a*-compliant rule’ to refer to the policing of morals, or the enforcement of public morals by ‘religious police.’ ‘Religious police’ monitor whether members of the public are adhering to Islamic rules and standards of behaviour. If they identify non-compliance, they will advise or admonish the offender and, if they deem it necessary, investigate or detain that person. Religious police have an essential role to play in a ‘*sharī’a*-compliant rule’ in that they help form and maintain a public order that is based on Islamic values.

It should be noted that the organisations charged with such moral policing do not self-identify as ‘religious police’. ‘Religious police’ is a moniker frequently used by non-Muslims, and it is often associated with stoning and caning. Thus, although it is widely known that religious police forces exist, little is known about their operations or how local populations perceive these forces. Accordingly, I aim in this article to outline the features and issues with religious police and their moral policing through the lens of today’s Muslim societies. The countries and regions with institutionalised religious police forces all share a similar background: during the rise of a new state or a political or social reform, the emerging state institutions set their sights on the creation of an Islamic society. As such, religious police are deemed to have an essential role in society, at least in theory.

How warmly they are viewed by the local population is another matter. I will explore the ambivalent character of the religious police in each society.

II. Ideological and Historical Background

1. 'Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice'

First, I will outline the ideological and historical background of religious police. The most important concept underpinning religious police and their operations is the Islamic requisite to 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' (Ar: *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-n-nahy 'an al-munkar*). This tenet is most commonly attributed to the following verse of the *Qur'an*:

*And let there be among you a community promoting virtue, and advocating righteousness, and preventing vice. These are the successful.*¹

There is also a famous *ḥadīth*, records of *Sunna*:

*Whoever among you sees vice, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.*²

This *ḥadīth* gives vital insight into the meaning of requisite in order to understand 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' for Muslims. According to the *ḥadīth*, 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' is not about a Muslim's personal, inward faith. Rather, it is a prerogative for outward action, to actively intervene in the lives of others.

In his prominent work on promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, Michael Cook makes an intriguing reference to a rape incident that occurred in 1988 in Chicago [Cook 2000: ix-xi]. Reports of the incident described how numerous people stood by without responding to the woman's cries for help.

According to Cook, the aspect of the case that the newspapers considered newsworthy was not the rape itself but the conduct of the onlookers. The reports implied that their conduct was shameful and assumed that readers would react with indignation. In other words, the assumption was that the witnesses had a duty to intervene and prevent the reprehensible act. Having related this incident, Cook then describes Islam's 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' as 'both a name and a doctrine for a broad moral duty of this kind [Cook 2000: xi].'

2. *Ḥisba* and *Muḥtasib*

I discuss three religious police forces in this article, all of which are in Sunni countries or regions. The first example is the religious police of Saudi Arabia; the second is the religious police of the 'Islamic State' (ISIL); the third is the religious police in Indonesia's Aceh province. In line with classical Sunni Islamic studies, Sunni Muslims have attempted to institutionalise 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' as part of the doctrine of *ḥisba*. *Ḥisba* originally meant 'arithmetical' or 'sum'. Over the years, it came to mean the reward one might expect to receive from God in the hereafter in return for virtuous deeds done in this life [al-Sabat 1995: 28; Shaykh 1996: 9]. Based on this line of thought, *ḥisba* became a doctrine that obliges rulers to facilitate good deeds and encourage the people to follow Islamic principles. The most famous classical source for *ḥisba* comes from *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniya* (*The Ordinances of Government*), which was the chief work of 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī (975–1058), a jurist from the Abbasid Caliphate period (750–1517).³ *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniya* defines *ḥisba* as follows:

The term "ḥisbah" refers to commanding what is good when it is being neglected, and to forbidding what is bad if it is being practiced [Al-Māwardī 2000: 337].

This definition corresponds almost perfectly with that of 'promotion of virtue and prevention

of vice.’ Needless to say, the basis for determining whether something is ‘good (virtue)’ or ‘wrong (vice)’ is whether it accords with God’s teachings. It is then up to (Muslim) humans to determine whether to ‘enjoin’ or ‘forbid’ that thing. Thus, according to this perspective, ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ is about actively shepherding other people’s behaviour.

This concept was given further clout by Ibn Taymīya, a jurist from the Mamluk Sultanate period (1250–1517). Ibn Taymīya introduced a doctrine of governance with ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ at the core. In his work on *ḥisba*, Ibn Taymīya stated the following:

If the whole of religion and all authority is a matter of ordaining and forbidding, the ordaining with which God sent His Messenger is the ordaining of what is proper and the prohibition with which He sent him is the prohibition of the improper. This is the characteristic of the Prophet and the Believers... This is a duty incumbent on every able Muslim. The responsibility is collective, but becomes individual for the able person when no-one else undertakes it. Ability is power and authority, for those who have power are more able than others and so come under obligations which others do not bear. For the measure of obligation is ability, and every man is responsible to the extent of his ability... All Islamic authorities have the sole aim of ordaining what is proper and forbidding the improper, whether it be the greater military authority like the Prime Ministry, the lesser such as the police authority, and the hisba authority [Ibn Taymīya 1985: 22–23].

Thus, according to Ibn Taymīya, although every Muslim has a duty to ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice,’ some have greater competence and power than others, and so it behoves public authorities (who should have the most competence and power) to effectively take on the lion’s share of ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice.’

The individuals charged with supervising public order were called *muḥtasib*. According to al-Māwardī, *muḥtasib* is freeman, rather than slaves, and they are freeman, just, of sound judgement, firm and severe in the religion, and clearly aware of what evil behaviour is [Al-Māwardī 2000: 337–338]. *Muḥtasib* was tasked with monitoring whether Muslims were behaving in accordance with *sharī’a* (i.e., in accordance with the behavioural standards set in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna*) [al-Shayzarī 1999]. They were particularly known for their role in ensuring fair market transactions, as suggested by the fact that their name also signified ‘market supervisor’ [Stilt 2011: 39]. It is no surprise, then, that the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*’s entry for *ḥisba* focuses for the most part on the *muḥtasib* and their market role, while making only a cursory mention of *ḥisba*’s meaning in terms of ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ [Ansari 1986: 485–493].

In the modern age, the focus of *muḥtasib*’s duties shifted to conventional trade law and public security—matters that fell within the purview of secular law and secular institutions. Thus systems of moral policing are arguably a remnant of the past in that they are based on the divine imperative to ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ and were incorporated into Islamic law under the name of *ḥisba*. The religious police forces that have re-emerged in parts of the Islamic world today are purportedly continuing the historic role of the *muḥtasib*. However, with a segregation of roles between religious and secular institutions, the focus of the religious police is now of a much more religious nature than that which historically concerned the *muḥtasib*.

3. Previous Research on ‘Religious Police’

In the following, I review the previous works on the topic. The first example, which I referred to earlier, is Michael Cook’s work [Cook 2000], a landmark publication in the history of Islam and Islamic thought. Cook includes perspectives from the main Sunni schools of law as well as Shia theological schools and even the minority such as Ibadi group.

He examines in detail how 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' is ideologically positioned and how it developed in each of these schools. The publication is valuable in that it is the only work that focuses squarely on the ideological history of 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice.'

On the other hand, in focusing so much on ideological aspects, Cook leaves little room for describing or examining the specific operations of religious police, and he offers only scant information on the relationship between the religious police and the societies in which they operate. I might also add that the book was published in 2000, and it warrants updating in two key important respects. First, it is necessary to briefly introduce the religious police forces that have emerged since the beginning of this millennium. Second, it is necessary to re-examine the religious police in light of recent social developments, including the rise of extremism and women's social progress and empowerment. In the present article, I attempt to supplement these shortfalls by examining issues that are relevant today. Hence, two of the cases I cover are the ISIL and the Indonesian province of Aceh, both of which belong to this millennium. Furthermore, in my analysis of Saudi Arabia's religious police, I consider the recent social developments in the kingdom.

There are also a number of publications that have explored specific religious police forces. The place that is most famous for its modern religious police and whose religious police force has the longest history is Saudi Arabia. Nabil Mouline's work provides a wealth of information on the kingdom's religious police force and makes for ideal introductory reading [Mouline 2011]. Most of the researches on Saudi Arabia's religious institutions focuses on trends in the Council of Senior Ulema (*Hay'a Kibār al-'Ulamā*) and its important political role [Al Atawneh 2010]. Thus Mouline's work mentioned above is almost the first such work to deal with Saudi's religious police.

Today, much of the world has come to know of religious police through extremist groups [Eltantawi 2017; Rashid 2000]. Of these, I focus on the most

notorious organisation of recent times, ISIL, which exercises control over parts of Iraq and Syria. ISIL's moral policing operations are well known, having been luridly broadcast to the world via the Internet and other media. However, most analyses of these operations simply treat them as illustrative of the violent and barbaric nature of the ISIL's rule. Thus, except in some rare cases such as Charles Lister's thorough analysis [Lister 2014], few attempts are made to determine the doctrinal or strategic significance such policing holds for ISIL.

The religious police that have attracted the greatest amount of research are those of Aceh, the only Indonesian province with a religious police force. One reason concerns Aceh's special circumstances. After a long campaign for independence from Indonesia, Aceh eventually entered a peace agreement with the Indonesian central government. Due to these circumstances, the province attracts a great deal of academic interest for reasons that are not always connected to Islam. Moreover, Aceh's religious policing and its peace agreement with the Indonesian government are both products to some extent of the damage the province suffered in the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and *tsunami* (seismic sea waves). Accordingly, Aceh and its religious policing are topics of interest in research on the natural disaster. Examples of attempts to analyse religious policing in Aceh include R. Michael Feener's work [Feener 2013], Benjamin Otto and Jan Michiel's work [Otto and Michiel 2016]. Both publications focus on the peculiar circumstances of Aceh and its religious police, and using observation and interview data, they analyse the background of the religious police force and how it enforces public morals today.

Thus the religious police forces of specific countries and regions have been studied to some extent. However, none of the research has comparatively analysed different cases of religious policing in a way similar to how Cook compared cases of 'promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' in his historical research on ideology. Likewise, only a few studies have

comparatively analysed different cases of religious police operations in terms of the role and significance that these operations hold. Against this backdrop, I comparatively analysed multiple cases in attempt to identify the significance of and issues associated with moral enforcement as they relate to today's Muslim world.

III. The Committee of the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in Saudi Arabia

1. Saudi Uniqueness and 'Religious Police'

First, I outline Saudi Arabia's religious police, who are known as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV)⁴, while also discussing Saudi Arabia's unique circumstances.

Saudi Arabia traces its direct origins to the mid-18th century. Much of the territory of modern-day Saudi Arabia, particularly its capital, Riyāḍ, has no historic continuity with the Islamic dynasties that ruled Makka and Madīna from the time of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750) to the end of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), meaning that Saudi Arabia's capital and other territories except Hijāz region, the Western part of Arabian Peninsula including Makka and Madīna have no particular significance in Islamic history. Because of this factor, the Saudi people, unlike their neighbours, were never subject to foreign rule or mandate since the time the first Saudi state was founded in 1744. Consequently, Saudi Arabia lacks many of the traditions associated with an Islamic country, while on the other hand, it lacks the rudiments of a modern nation-state. Instead, the kingdom has pursued its own path without being swayed by notions of either a medieval or a Western-style state.

This uniqueness formed the backdrop against which 'Wahhabism' (*ḥaraka al-Wahhābiya*) emerged. The history of Saudi Arabia in its current form can be divided into three periods of rule: the first Saudi state (Emirate of Dir'īya; 1744–1818), the second Saudi

state (Emirate of Najd; 1820–1889), and the third Saudi state (modern-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia; 1932–).⁵ The first Saudi state arose in 1744 in Dir'īya, a town on the outskirts of Riyāḍ. The catalyst was an encounter between Muḥammad ibn Su'ūd (1687–1765), a potentate based in Dir'īya, and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1791), a famous puritanical theologian in Najd. Muḥammad ibn Su'ūd sought Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb to be his ideological sponsor. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, for his part, believed that society should be founded on a conservative (in his view, the correct) interpretation of Islamic scripture, and he wanted Ibn Su'ūd to bring about such a society. As their interests coalesced, the two men formed a pact. Under this pact, there was to be a stamping out of practices, such as veneration of the tombs of saints and tree worship, that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb regarded as *shirk* (polytheistic or idolatrous). The pact also designated Muḥammad ibn Su'ūd and his descendants (Āl Su'ūd, or the House of Saud) as the ones to rule such a society [Darwish 2005: 23–24; Rentz 2004: 49–51].

It is from Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb that Wahhabism derives its name. When viewed as a religious ideology, Wahhabism is a puritanical version of Islam that denounces tree worship, the use of charms, Sufi rituals, and the like on the basis that they are heretical innovations (*bid'a*) stemming from sources other than the *Qur'ān* and *Sunna*.⁶ That said, the central purpose of the above pact was to create an Islamic society governed by the House of Saud. When viewed in this context, Wahhabism is not so much a religious creed concerned with the faith and conduct of individual Muslims as it is a political ideology with a clearly stated goal: to establish a state based on Islamic values [DeLong-Bas 2007: 9, 19].

In this political conception of Wahhabism, the CPVPV has a paramount role in relation to the Wahhabis' stated end and means. By enforcing public morals, the CPVPV helps create a society founded on the 'correct' form of Islam, while also acting as a watchdog that ensures the Saudi state's commitment to the historic pact. The CPVPV's role in this respect

is well illustrated by the fact that it is Saudi's oldest official religious organisation. In 1902, the House of Saud subjugated Riyāḍ and established the third Saudi state, which continues to this day. After the Ottoman troops were expelled, tribal strife erupted across the Arabian Peninsula. Capitalising on the tribal rivalry, the House of Saud gained control over the eastern part of the peninsula with the support of British forces and an army of nomadic tribesman called 'Brothers' (*Ikhḥwān*), who forced Bedouin tribes to settle around sedentary populations.⁷ In the process of conquering the Arabian Peninsula, the prototype of the CPVPV emerged in Riyāḍ in 1917 as a committee of six scholars, the foremost of whom was 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Laṭīf, a descendant of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.⁸

In 1924, the CPVPV was founded as an official government agency. Notably, it was headquartered in Makka. It is unlikely that Wahhabi rule would have taken root immediately in the areas that the House of Saud conquered. Indeed, Makka at the time was a very cosmopolitan place; it was under the stewardship of the Ottoman-appointed *sharīf* of Makka and had a constant flow of pilgrims from around the world. Thus, the House of Saud may have chosen Makka as the location of the headquarters because they viewed Makka as a frontier location and because they realised how important, and also how difficult, it would be to inculcate Wahhabism in such a frontier.

2. Mission of the Committee

Once the committee's headquarters were founded in 1924, other branches were established in nearby municipalities. In 1952, the headquarters were relocated to Riyāḍ, some two decades after the city was conquered [Ibn Ḥudayrī 2005: 327-329; Ibn Mu'ammār, al-Zīd and al-Sulṭān (eds.) 2012: 857-859]. This relocation probably reflected the fact that Makka was no longer a frontier and that Wahhabism had sufficiently taken root there.⁹

The following is the first-ever code governing the committee's operations. The code is from 1928, when the committee was still headquartered in Makka

[CPVPV 2009/10c: 130].

Article 1: The committee consists of branches in Makka, Jidda, Madīna, Ta'if, Yanbu', and other areas. Each branch may request extra members from related organisations.

Article 2: The members of the committee and of related organisations may be increased as necessary.

Article 3: Members of the committee must be knowledgeable about Islamic law (*sharī'a*) and uphold high moral standards. Members of related organisations must be of upstanding character, morally virtuous, and pious.

Article 4: Each branch shall be provided with enough soldiers as is necessary for the branch to discharge its duties. These soldiers shall be God-fearing men of upstanding character.

Article 5: Daily meetings shall be held in order to discharge duties. Members of related organisations shall issue weekly reports of these meetings and address any questions and directives from the committee members.

Article 6: The duties of committee members are as follows:

- A: Informing people of the *ṣalāt* (prayer) times and when people fail to perform their prayer, conveying such persons to the nearest mosque;
- B: Inspecting questionable locations or areas in the company of at least one colleague, senior, or police officer;
- C: Preventing people from committing crimes, sins, violating religious precepts, or being misguided by groundless rumours;
- D: In a kind and gentle manner, preventing people from committing slander or using foul language; and
- E: Protecting the living.

Article 7: Resolutions of the committee shall require a majority vote. If the committee president fails to obtain a majority vote, he shall not exclude any officers; instead, the legal affairs director shall assume the authority.

Article 8: The committee president may visit each division and instruct committee officers how to carry out their duties. No one shall prevent a committee member from discharging the duties assigned to him.

Article 9: Sentences that the committee may execute shall be limited to ten lashes or three days' imprisonment, and a guarantor shall be issued to a discharged prisoner. If the sentence is light, the committee may execute it without obtaining any permission from another institution, and the head of a prison shall discharge the sentence as appropriate.

The above code clearly indicates that the CPVPV was expected to play a religious oversight role by closely monitoring the public's adherence to Islamic standards of behaviour. Article 4 provides that the CPVPV can deploy soldiers, meaning that the CPVPV was equipped to keep public order, through military force if necessary. The code was formulated only four years after the CPVPV was founded. At that time, Wahhabist rule had not yet been securely established in the new territories. It therefore makes sense that the CPVPV, as an organisation set up on the kingdom's frontier, was expected to help maintain public order.¹⁰

Conversely, the public-order role of the CPVPV declined in importance as the House of Saud's rule became more secure. In other words, when viewed across the scope of its history, the CPVPV was generally on a declining trajectory. In 1976, the CPVPV was institutionalised as an official government

agency. Since then, its role has been largely confined to enforcing public morals in urban areas, and it has assumed the trappings of what we recognise today as a religious police force.

3. Organization and Activities of the Committee

In the following, I describe the organisational apparatus under which the CPVPV enforces public morals. First, let us see how the CPVPV itself clarifies its operations today according to its publication [CPVPV 2009/10b: 8].

CPVPV's Purpose

Article 1: The CPVPV shall take on the *shari'a* duty of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice and ensure benevolence reigns. To this end, its organisational apparatus, articles of incorporation, and sphere of authority shall be defined.

Article 2: The CPVPV shall endeavour to exterminate vice and prevent wanton wrongdoing.

Article 3: The CPVPV shall ensure the stability of Islamic doctrine, thought, morality, and the like.

Article 4: The CPVPV shall safeguard religion, souls, reason, honour, and property in accordance with *shari'a*.

Article 5: The CPVPV shall establish Islamic values and morality.

Article 6: The CPVPV shall ensure that there prevails a form of Islam befitting Saudi Arabia's status as the centre of the Muslim world, as the place where the Revelation came down, as the model for the Muslim world, and as the centre of Muslims' attention.

CPVPV's Mission

Article 1: The CPVPV shall guide the people and encourage them to perform the religious obligations provided in *shari'a*.

Article 2: The CPVPV shall forbid people from committing actions forbidden in *shari'a*, conforming to misguided customs or teachings (*taqlid*), or following unorthodox innovations (*bid'a*). It shall police the people in a moral manner and in a manner that



Figure 1. A scene of seizing illicit liquor by the members of the Committee (the capture image from MBC)

accords with the particular circumstances.

Article 3: The CPVPV shall work with related organisations to monitor prohibited acts that would affect doctrine, moral behaviour, and general conduct.

Article 4: The CPVPV shall work with related organisations to promote virtue and prevent vice and to protect the common good.

Article 5: The CPVPV shall deal with criminal offenses, violence, and other misdeeds in accordance with penal regulations.

Thus the above provisions position the CPVPV as a central pillar of Saudi Arabia's national policy of establishing a Wahhabist society. For example, the Purpose section stipulates that the CPVPV 'shall take on the *shari'a* duty of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' (Article 1) and establish a 'form of Islam befitting Saudi Arabia' (Article 6), while the Mission section cites 'unorthodox innovations' (*bid'a*) as an example of a 'vice' that must be forbidden.

While the CPVPV's inspection and enforcement operations are standardised by the committee's head [CPVPV 2009/10a: 31; 2009/10b: 77], who holds the rank of cabinet minister (since the CPVPV is a government agency), the number of the CPVPV employees has been on the increase ever since the organisation was founded (See Table 1). The fact that the CPVPV's workforce is growing is not in itself surprising, given that Saudi Arabia's population

continues to grow. What is of note is the changing composition of the workforce; in the past, clerical staff outnumbered patrol officers, but the balance has recently reversed. This shift implies that the relative importance of patrols is on the increase. The increasing number of patrol officers does not reflect the population growth *per se*. Rather, it reflects the fact that young people make up an increasingly large proportion of the population and the fact that crime has become more complex (issues that I discuss later). As of 2009–2010, there were 462 CPVPV units across the kingdom's 13 provinces (116 of which were 'branches' and 346 of which were 'stations', see Table 2). Many of these units were concentrated in three provinces: Riyāḍ (home to the eponymous capital city), Makka (home to the port city of Jidda and the holy city of Makka), and Eastern (al-Sharqīya) Province (where many oil-production facilities are located).

Table 2. Number of branches/stations in provinces
[CPVPV 2009/10b: 112]

Province	Branches (hay'āt)	Stations (marākiz)
Riyāḍ	20	97
Makka	12	69
Madīna	7	19
Qaṣīm	11	29
Eastern	11	25
'Asīr	12	41
Tabūk	6	4
Ḥā'il	4	23
Northern Border	3	7
Jāzān	14	11
Najrān	6	5
Bāḥa	7	11
Jawf	3	5
Total	116	346

Table 1: Number of employees of the committee
[CPVPV 2009/10b: 100]

Year: AD/H	Administrative	Patrol	Total
1998 / 1419-18	700	87	787
1999 / 1419-20	283	95	378
2000 / 1420-21	794	82	776
2001 / 1421-22	872	145	1017
2002 / 1422-23	1082	89	1171
2003 / 1423-24	1853	124	1977
2004 / 1424-25	1431	191	1622
2005 / 1425-26	1787	369	2156
2006 / 1426-27	2755	429	3184
2007 / 1427-28	3442	721	4163
2012 / 1434	2118	5545	7663

Next, we look at the CPVPV's main policing operations as described in its own official publication (See Table 3). The operations fall under nine categories: doctrine, rituals, morals, drink, drugs, publications, trade, conduct, and other. The category that sees the largest number of annual operations is rituals. The reason why there are so many ritual-related

Table 3. Number of cases of the Committee's policing [CPVPV 2009/10b: 96]

Year: AD/H	Doctrine	Ritual	Moral	Alcohol	Drugs	Publication	Trade	Manner	Others	Total
1996-97 /1417	220	72131	16624	2112	145	1632	6878	6095	4373	110210
1997-98 /1418	509	123868	23098	2898	202	2101	8107	10189	7787	178759
1998-99 /1419	608	180759	34169	2901	262	3283	8913	10318	4692	245905
1999-2000 /1420	863	241872	41890	2722	490	4222	8983	13842	6107	320991
2000-01 /1421	896	238024	41759	3008	349	2678	9223	16058	3501	315496
2001-02 /1422	579	243670	41095	3237	493	2190	10388	21367	4593	327612
2003 /1423-24	2515	297250	45004	3366	785	3093	9423	15191	6004	382631
2004 /1424-25	647	277963	48603	5708	1473	6218	9945	23894	9983	384344
2005 /1425-26	444	302825	45709	3379	810	3533	5030	20500	7887	390117
2006 /1426-27	455	318986	49745	3009	655	2789	6658	26455	8004	416756
2007 /1427-28	585	230710	34826	1723	322	1693	5636	20144	5244	300883

operations is that these operations concern a fixture of daily life: the five daily prayers. They also extend to providing instruction at the time of the *ḥajj* (the annual pilgrimage to Makka). Concerning the distribution of annual operations, operations are conducted much more frequently in Riyāḍ province and Makka province, the same provinces that have disproportionately high numbers of the CPVPV employees.

4. The Committee and People in Changing Society

Today, Saudi Arabia has a rather distinctive demographic composition: the majority of the Saudi population is below the age of 25 years. During the reign of the previous king, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl Su'ūd (1924–2015, r. 2005–2015), the Saudi government encouraged young subjects to study in Western countries; such overseas study was previously limited to royalty and a handful of the elite. The government also promoted female empowerment.¹¹ This change has not led to any unilateral rejection of the kingdom's past policies or a rejection of Saudi's Wahhabist customs and values. That said, the flipside of the above changes is that the CPVPV has become the target of criticism.

Inasmuch as the CPVPV epitomises the religious underpinnings of Saudi national policy, many members of the public, particularly young people and women, see the agency as a force that stands in the way

of social reform. Additionally, many people resent the CPVPV for the violence it has inflicted upon them.¹² In response, individuals inside and outside the CPVPV started exploring ways of reforming the agency. From 2010, there were a number of advisory panels on the matter, whose members included outside intellectuals, such as staff from Saudi universities and members of advisory panels.¹³

The reformist mood reached its peak when 'Abd al-Laṭīf ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl al-Shaykh (1947–) became the new head of the CPVPV. Noted for his tolerant personality and moderate stance toward social problems, Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz announced upon taking up the post that the essence of the CPVPV's work lay in



Figure 2. Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (right) visiting the International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education held on April 2012 in Riyāḍ.

protecting the rights of the people and the *hisba*.¹⁴ Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz displayed his awareness of the criticisms levied at the CPVPV and his hopes of addressing the criticisms. He stated that the CPVPV would henceforth ‘prevent wrongdoing without committing wrongdoing itself in the process’ and that ‘although we are not saints, we will endeavour to gain the trust of the people toward our activities [CPVPV 2011: 7-9].’¹⁵ These words were backed up by concrete reforms such as stepping up efforts to root out illegal enforcement, introducing tougher penalties for such enforcement, and banning volunteer patrols.¹⁶ The Saudi people generally praised Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s reforms.¹⁷

However, even under Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s leadership, the CVPVP failed to entirely overturn its negative reputation. Amidst this state of affairs, Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was dismissed in January 2015. Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s dismissal was decided shortly after the accession to the throne of the present king, Salmān ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl Su‘ūd (1935–, r. 2015–). Commentators initially speculated that the dismissal of such a moderate had signalled that King Salmān’s reign would head in a more religiously conservative direction. As it turned out, however, the measure was in fact smoothing the way for further social reforms. In April 2016, Muḥammed ibn Salmān ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl Su‘ūd (1985–), who after his father’s accession had been appointed to key posts, such as the minister of defence (he then became crown prince in June 2017), introduced an economic development and reform plan titled ‘Saudi Vision 2030.’ Under Saudi Vision 2030, the government introduced a succession of reforms apparently aimed at overturning conservatism in the kingdom. Examples include allowing women to drive vehicles, allowing commercial cinemas to operate in the kingdom, allowing women to use sport and fitness facilities, and allowing music concerts [al-Arabiya English 2018]. Immediately before Saudi Vision 2030 was released, the government announced that the CPVPV would be formally deprived of its right to arrest people and that its patrols and other investigative operations would be significantly curbed

[The National 2016]. Since then, there have been fewer CPVPV patrols in urban areas, and the agency’s profile has been steadily waning.

IV. The *Hisba* Agency in ‘Islamic State’ (ISIL)

1. Root of ISIL

In this section, I discuss the ‘Islamic State’s’ religious policing. In June 2014, Sunni militants declared the foundation of ISIL. Since then, the group has exercised control in the northern areas of Iraq and Syria. It has also displayed a more global influence by inspiring individuals around the world to commit terrorist acts in its name. ISIL is also known for enforcing Islamic rule in the territories it controls. For example, it has exacted harsh punishments such as stoning and has banned entertainment (by confiscating musical instruments and alcoholic beverages). People around the world have viewed such actions as barbaric and medieval. In the following, I explore the roots of ISIL, including its *modus operandi*, and examine how ISIL regards the role of religious police.

ISIL traces its origins to the Organization of Monotheism and Jihad (*Jamā‘a al-Tawḥīd wa-l-Jihād*; JTJ). JTJ was a small group that operated under the umbrella of al-Qā‘ida, the global network of Islamic militants hostile to US influence, among other things. It was led by the Jordanian national Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī (1966–2006). Initially, al-Zarqāwī participated in al-Qā‘ida’s operations in the Soviet-Afghan War. When the US launched airstrikes in Afghanistan following the attacks of 11 September 2001, al-Zarqāwī helped al-Qā‘ida move its operations to Iraq [Moubayed 2015: 88-89]. In 2003, the US invaded Iraq, and a new US-backed Iraqi government was established. Subsequently, al-Zarqāwī started directing an armed insurgency campaign under the banner of JTJ.¹⁸ In October 2006, al-Zarqāwī changed the organisation’s name to the ‘Islamic State in Iraq’ (*Dawla al-Islāmiya fī al-‘Irāq*; ISI).

Al-Zarqāwī was killed in a US airstrike in

June 2006. Deprived of its leader, ISI's membership fell into disorder and splintered. Meanwhile, US and Iraqi forces were steadily winning hearts and minds by providing arms and resources to local residents. Consequently, Iraqis became less supportive of the campaign to create an Islamic state in Iraq, and this development encouraged the US-backed Iraqi government to strengthen its support base among the Shia population. Against this backdrop, the man who would later become head of ISIL, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī (1971–), rapidly gained influence by exploiting the political instability in Iraq's neighbour Syria.

Born in Sāmarrā', Iraq, al-Baghdādī is said to have had a rather unremarkable youth. He was supposedly a Ba'thist at the time the US invaded Iraq. He then committed himself to resisting US occupation and joined ISI. In 2010, he was chosen as the group's leader. The year 2011 saw the start of the 'Arab Spring,' a movement calling for democracy in the Middle East. The Arab Spring prompted mass demonstrations in Syria, which soon developed into a civil conflict between government and anti-government forces. Syria had thus become the new frontline for Islamic militants. ISI saw this shift to Syria as a welcome opportunity to move out of Iraq, where its position had grown vulnerable.¹⁹

The shift was also providential for another reason. In Iraq, ISI was portrayed as a terrorist group that threatened the new democratic Iraqi government. In Syria, however, it was the anti-government forces that garnered sympathy from the international community. Hence, by supporting the Syrian insurgency, ISI was fighting for a 'just cause', which made it eligible to receive arms and other supplies from neighbouring states that sought an end to Ba'thist rule. Battle-hardened from its campaign in Iraq, ISI soon became the leading anti-government force in Syria.

Having thus established a corridor in the north of Iraq and Syria, ISI changed its name to ISIL, the 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant' (*al-Dawla al-*

Islāmīya fī al-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām, also known as the 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,' or ISIS etc.) in April 2013. In June 2014, ISIL used the military resources it had accumulated in Iraq to renew its insurgency in northern Iraq. The group then renamed itself ISIL and became the world's most infamous Islamist organisation.

2. Caliphate and *Hisba*

One reason why ISIL attracts so much attention is that it declared itself a caliphate. To many Muslims, particularly Sunni Muslims, a caliphate is the legitimate form of Islamic rule, one that had ended with the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate. When ISIL proclaimed that it had restored such a caliphate, the international community reacted with alarm. Until a US-led coalition launched airstrikes against in September 2014, the international community including Islamic and Arab countries sought to chip away at ISIL's power in various ways. In particular, they sought to discredit the reputation of al-Baghdādī, the self-appointed caliph.²⁰ Their intention was to portray ISIL as an inauthentic caliphate.

But were these efforts actually effective? It appears not. The personal attacks against al-Baghdādī might have been a waste of time; even if one accepted that al-Baghdādī was as unfit to rule as caliph, this would have only implied that al-Baghdādī should resign his office. ISIL, for its part, never touted the personal charisma of its leader. It was the caliphate, rather than the caliph, that was all-important to ISIL. ISIL sought to advertise to the Muslim world how the restored caliphate would regenerate Muslim society. By establishing a legitimate society founded on Islam, ISIL could show the world how valuable and efficacious a caliphate is, while at the same time legitimising itself as the organisation that restored such a system. To achieve its vision of an Islamic society that only such a caliphate could deliver, ISIL, among other things, strove to inculcate and maintain public morals through religious policing.

ISIL's rule was not entirely unitary and

institutionalised. As ISIL consolidated its grip over each area, it started classifying these areas as administrative divisions called *wilāya* (province). However, this did not imply that ISIL was supplying the military forces of each *wilāya* with personnel and other resources or directing their operations. In other words, ISIL's overarching structure was different from the structures existing in each *wilāya*. Likewise, the religious policing varied from one *wilāya* to the next. With this in mind, what did *ḥisba* mean to ISIL, and what operations did it conduct in the name of *ḥisba*?

We can glean some insights from ISIL's irregular publication *Dābiq*. The third issue, 'A Call to Hijrah' (September 2014), contains a feature titled 'Da'wa (calling to Islam) and *ḥisba* in ISIL'. The article presents a series of images, which it describes as 'a window into the various *ḥisba* and da'wa related events and activities taking place within ISIL'. The pictures show a *Qur'ān* school, distribution of materials for da'wa, pledges of allegiance (*bay'a*), the destruction

of the tomb of saint, the destruction of tobacco, and group repentance of *Ṣaḥwa* (awakeness) fighters.

Of these activities, the one most actively conducted was the destruction of the tombs. In July 2015, ISIL issued the '*Fatwā* Justifying the Destruction of Tombs Built for the Prophets of Allah (May Peace Be upon Them)', in which they defended their actions as follows:

Our enemies accuse us of destroying the domes, edifices, and historical sites adjoining the tombs that are situated within our territory. This is indeed what we are doing, and it is a righteous course of action [al-Dawla al-Islāmiya 2015: 1-3].

Thus, since declaring the caliphate in June 2014, ISIL has destroyed many tombs and other religious sites in Iraq and Syria. (See Table 4) In defence of these actions, it claims that these sites had become targets of *shirk*, suggesting that Muslims were deifying

Table 4: List of major reported cases about the ISIL's demolition of religious sites.

Year	Month	Day	Province ^{*1}	Subjects of demolition
2014	7	5	Ninawā	graves (<i>adriḥa</i>) and statues (<i>authān</i>) in Mawṣil (ḥusayniya al-Qubba), al-Maḥlabiya (tomb of Aḥmad al-Rifā'i) and Tal 'Afar (ḥusayniya jawwād)
	8	26	Diyālā	sites for worship (<i>ma'bad</i>) of <i>rāfiḍa</i> ^{*2}
		30	Ninawā	tomb of Yahyā Abū al-Qāsim
	12	22	Dimashq	sites of polytheist (<i>ma'ālim al-shirk</i>) in Bi'r al-Qasab.
2015	1	26	Ṭarābulus	graves and sites of polytheist
	2	15	Raqqā	statues
	4	4	Dijla	statues
		11	Ninawā	sites of polytheist
	5	4	Ṭarābulus	sites of polytheist
		22	Najd	sites for worship of <i>rāfiḍa</i> in Qatīf
	6	17	Ṣan'a'	sites for worship of <i>rāfiḍa</i>
		20	Ṣan'a'	sites for worship of <i>rāfiḍa</i>
		22	Ḥimṣ	sites of polytheists
		26	Najd	sites for worship of <i>rāfiḍa</i> in Kuwait.
	7	7	Ṣan'a'	sites for worship of polytheist
		29	Ṣan'a'	sites for worship of Ismailism
	8	8	Fallūja	graves
		21	Dimashq	Monastery of St. Elian in al-Qaryatayn
		25	Ḥimṣ	Temple of Baal Shamin in Palmyra

*1: provinces named by ISIL

*2: *rāfiḍa*, meaning 'those who reject' in Arabic, is a derogatory name that Sunni Muslims use to refer to Shias.

the sites in place of God or ascribing to them qualities that should be attributed to God alone.

3. Activities of the *Hisba* Agency

ISIL considered the destruction of tombs to be, as it were, breaking ground to prepare to build a society based on ‘*shari’a*-compliant rule.’ If this was the case, then the society-building work—enforcing public morals—would start later. Sure enough, an organisation said to be a ‘religious police’ force made its online debut around the time the tombs were destroyed.

ISIL’s religious police go by a number of names in the media. In Arabic, they have been called *shurṭa dīniya* (religious police) and *shurṭa islāmīya* (Islamic police). In English, they have been called ‘religious police’, a ‘religious police force’, ‘jihadist police’, and ‘IS police,’ etc.

According to photographic evidence, the patrol vehicles used in religious policing operations are typically labelled with a single word: ‘*hisba*.’ In some cases, ‘*Hisba* Agency’ (*Diwān al-Ḥisba*) is written on the vehicles, but there is no consistent labelling. Often, ISIL describes its religious police as simply ‘*hisba*’, but I will use the ‘*Hisba* Agency’ label to avoid confusion with ‘*hisba*’ as used in Islamic jurisprudence.

Institutionally, the *Hisba* Agency has come to be recognised as a part of ISIL’s judiciary. Accordingly, the *Hisba* Agency has become involved in a spectrum of judicial operations, from enforcement to trial/sentencing to sentence execution. Its judicial operations have been presented in a range of Islamic State material. One example is a video series titled ‘Men of *Hisba*’ (*Rijāl al-ḥisba*), which began in December 2014. The first video in the series depicts men confiscating and destroying tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, whiskey, and beverages past their use-by date in Raqqa, the capital of Syria’s Raqqa Governorate and at the time, a stronghold of ISIL.

The second video in the series is set in the same area. It shows a scene where a group of men search the home of a ‘sorcerer’, confiscate his paraphernalia (cards, charms, and perfume), and take him into custody. The ‘sorcerer’ is conveyed to a main thoroughfare, where he is shown kneeling and blindfolded. A voice projected through a loudspeaker announces the man’s name, his crime (sorcery), and his sentence (decapitation by sword). The sentence is then executed. The video also features a vehicle bearing the label ‘*Hisba* Agency’ and an Islamic law court, illustrating that the concept of *hisba* had been institutionalised.

What specific offenses are targeted in religious



Figure 3. A scene of demolishing a small tomb by bulldozer.



Figure 4. A scene of collecting alcohol, cigarette and waterpipe to incinerate them.

policing according to ISIL's video material and media reports? The following table shows ISIL releases and general media reports that contain a reference to '*hisba*'. The cases have been arranged by region. They cover a period from June 2014 to August 2015, the same period in which ISIL destroyed religious sites.

According to this data, the *Hisba* Agency's operations cover the performance of rites, women's attire, and drink—similar to the basic categories covered by Saudi Arabia's CPVPV. However, the *Hisba* Agency's operations are more extensive than those of the CPVPV in that they also cover tobacco. The *Hisba* Agency also targets music and men's attire (specifically, Western-style and unisex dress).

Another notable feature of the *Hisba* Agency's operations is that women conduct some operations. In Islamic State-controlled areas, women engage in *hisba* and combat. Two famous all-women brigades are *al-Khansā'* and *Umm al-Rayyān* [al-Arabiya English 2014a; News.com 2014; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium n.d.-a, n.d.-b.]. These brigades consist of the wives of fighters, particularly fighters from abroad, and they conduct their inspections among women. They inspect the identities of women who come or go over ISIL's 'borders', and they also inspect women in cities so as to avoid cases of harassment that might occur if men inspected women.

Hisba in ISIL is not limited to moral enforcement. Officers of the *Hisba* Agency have frequently engaged in combat, killing foreign fighters, becoming the target of military attacks themselves, and engaging in frontline fighting. In the video materials, the officers

frequently appear wielding assault rifles and engaging in activities ranging from enforcing public morals, maintaining public order, and fighting the enemy.

4. Reconsidering the Role of Moral Policing for ISIL

Finally, how does ISIL, as a non-state actor, regard the strategic value of *hisba*? First, ISIL likely regarded the destruction of tombs as a signal to start the creation of a Muslim society. Given that ISIL conducted this activity during the initial stages of its conquest, the activity served to signal to the outside world that ISIL was now in control of the area. The same holds true for moral policing operations. Such operations are not even possible without achieving a certain level of control. Take, for example, the case of 'Ayn al-'Arab (Kurdish: Kobani), a city in Syria's Aleppo Governorate. This city is the scene of continued fighting between ISIL and Kurdish forces. It is unsurprising, therefore, that none of the reported *hisba* activities there involve moral policing; all involve acts of warfare. The reverse is true for areas that were Islamic State strongholds from the outside, such as the Iraqi governorate of Ninawā (where Mawṣil is located) and the Syrian governorates of Raqqa (where the city of Raqqa is located) and Dayr al-Zawr. In these areas, most of the reported *hisba* activities involve moral policing, while few involve military operations (See Table 5). Thus, *hisba* in ISIL is closely correlated with the degree of ISIL's grip on power. From a strategic perspective, *hisba* has both an inward and outward role. Inwardly, it serves to form and maintain public morals; outwardly, it serves to defend ISIL's borders from enemy forces.

As *hisba* can be justified on the grounds of the *ḥadīth* and Islamic scholarship, it has offered ISIL another kind of advantage. Namely, it has made it harder for geopolitically hostile Muslim nations to deploy the narrative that ISIL's activities are anti-Islamic. After all, what is 'anti-Islamic' about clamping down on alcohol consumption or admonishing Muslims who miss their prayers? This

Table 5: List of major reported cases of ISIL's policing

Country	Governorate	Cities	Reported activities concerning <i>ḥisba</i>
Iraq	Ninawā	Mawṣil	-Seizing tobacco, waterpipe, damaged jeans, cloth with a logo of the flags of the Western countries, tight cloth, etc. -Preventing harassment of women. -Demolition of the buildings affiliated to <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by the airstrike of US-led coalition.
		Unknown	-Demolition of holy shrines, executing people for homosexual by pushing from building's roof, robber by shooting and adultery by stoning.
	Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn	Unknown	-Killing an official of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by air strike of Iraqi air force.
Syria	Raqqā	Raqqā	-Seizing tobacco, drugs, alcohol and expired foods from stores. -Executing a magician by beheading. -Collecting <i>zakāt</i> . -Arresting girls by <i>al-Khansā'</i> and lashing them. -Arresting a man who took a picture of street. -Prohibiting women's travel to outside of ISIL's territory. -Protesting by the people because of non-performance of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> for merchants' jobbery. -Demolition of the buildings affiliated to <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by the airstrike of US-led coalition. -Defection of the top official of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> .
		Dayr al-Zawr	-Punishing for non-pray by 100 lashes and fine of 2,000 pounds, non-modest cloth of women by 60 lashes and fine of 2,500 pounds, smoking by 60 times lashing, robber by cutting off hand. -Executing adultery by stoning. -Arresting a smoking doctor working in the hospital. -Arresting a woman exposing her face and shooting 3 people those who tried to prevent the operation. -Killing 22 foreign fighters by the members of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> . -Killing of 5 members of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by bomb attack against the patrol vehicle.
	Dayr al-Zawr	Mayādīn	-Warning a man who wore tight cloth. -Arresting woman and man who had porno movies, a man with short-pants and a man smuggling tobacco. -Killing of the second in <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> , by torture and beheading. -Receiving aggression from the armed people.
		Abū Kamāl	-Punishing 15 women showing skin by lashing. -Warning a man working in a store for women. -Closing a store where a woman was. -Receiving aggression toward a patrol vehicle by foreign armed group. -Killing and injuring 6 members of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by bomb attack. -Demolition of the buildings affiliated to <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by the airstrike of US-led coalition.
		Unknown	-Prohibiting wireless internet in coffee shops while praying. -Prohibiting people's going out at the night and opening shops.
	Aleppo	Aleppo	-Punishing the people smuggling tobacco by 50 lashes, and those who have musical instruments by 90 lashes.
		'Ayn al-'Arab	-Killing 21 members of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by the airstrike of US-led coalition. -Killing more than 100 members of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> delivered from Raqqā and Aleppo through the clash with Kurdish troops.
		Manbij	-Punishing a robber by cutting off his hand. -Demolition of the buildings affiliated to <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by the airstrike of US-led coalition.
	Ḥasaka	Shaddādī	-Killing high officials of <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> by armed group.
	Idlib	Idlib	-Protesting by the people against <i>ḍirwān al-ḥisba</i> .
Libya	Ṭarābulṣ	Ṭarābulṣ	-Demolishing holy shrines. -Taking away the displays with pictures and mannequins from stores, seizing inappropriate cloth.
	Banghāzī	Banghāzī	-Prohibiting sales while praying.

Sources: News reports in English and Arabic, reports by Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (<http://www.syriahr.com/en/>), Detail Report on the Arab Spring in Syria: Latest Situation in Syria (Syriaarabspring.info: <http://syriaarabspring.info/>), Jihadology.net (<https://jihadology.net>) etc.

irreproachability embedded into ISIL's fabric has in fact shaped the discourse of ISIL's Muslim detractors. As a key example, I cite a statement about ISIL made by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd Allāh Āl al-Shaykh (1943–), in August 2014. The Grand Mufti stated that the forces of ISIL are 'not in any way part of Islam', and indeed, that they are 'destroying human civilization' and are 'enemy number one of Islam' [Aljazeera English 2014]. Arab nations and the international community exaggerated the statement, presenting it as the Grand Mufti's denouncement of ISIL. On close examination, however, the statement is a warning about ISIL's geopolitical threat to the peace and security of Saudi Arabia, rather than a religious denouncement of Islamic State rule. Admittedly, the Grand Mufti accused Islamic State forces of 'destroying human civilization', framing it as the common enemy of the international community. However, in doing so, this foremost Islamic jurist was, in a sense, tacitly admitting that ISIL was Islamic, at least from a Wahhabist perspective.

Of course, that is not to say that Muslims have welcomed ISIL's vision of a Muslim community. ISIL's self-declared caliphate proved increasingly unpalatable to Muslims as more grisly details emerged of the violent and barbarous nature of ISIL's activities, whether destructions of religious sites or killings in the name of enforcing public morals. What is worth noting, however, is that these Muslims were not rejecting the idea of the caliphate or the practice of *ḥisba* per se, and they certainly were not rejecting the idea that a state should be Islamic. What they found unpalatable was ISIL's absolutist approach, including its narrow interpretation of 'sharī'a-compliant rule' and its desire to achieve its ends at any means. Thus, when examining ISIL's activities, it is important to consider both the doctrinal and strategic elements underpinning them.

IV. *Hisbah* Police in Aceh, Indonesia

1. Aceh in Indonesia, and *Tsunami*

The third and final case is religious policing in Aceh, Indonesia. First, I briefly outline the background of Aceh's religious police force.

Aceh is an Indonesian province on the northern end of Sumatra with a population of 5 million. It is known as the place where Islam first took root in Southeast Asia.²¹ After the Second World War, the province engaged in a long rebellion against the central Indonesian government. After Indonesia declared independence in 1945, its first president, Sukarno (1901–1970, presidency: 1945–1967), praised the Acehnese for their efforts in supporting Indonesia's war of independence against the Dutch and promised to grant Aceh political autonomy as a reward for their efforts. However, in 1950, Sukarno dissolved Aceh Province and incorporated it into North Sumatra Province. This apparent betrayal galvanised the independence movement, which was led by the local scholars. An armed separatist campaign was then launched by *Darul Islam* (House of Islam). In 1959, the Indonesian government offered an olive branch by designating Aceh a 'special province' with greater autonomy. However, the insurgency then re-emerged under the banner of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM: Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) following a dispute over the unequal distribution of resources between the central government and Aceh.²² President Abdurrahman Wahid (1970–2009, presidency: 1999–2001) sought peace talks with GAM, but progress stalled because the military was opposed to the talks. Wahid's successor, President Megawati Sukarnoputri (1947–, presidency: 2001–2004), imposed martial law in Aceh, which reignited the separatist movement.

Both the government and the separatists changed their course significantly after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and *tsunami*. Striking with a magnitude of over 9, the earthquake caused a series of tsunamis, which devastated coastal areas. In the northeast of Sumatra, the death toll reached

130,000, with 370,000 reported missing. Situated close to the epicentre, Aceh was one of the regions hit in the disaster. The damage prompted the Acehnese to suspend their separatist struggle. The two sides resumed peace talks and, on 15 August 2005, signed a peace deal in Helsinki, Finland. The deal granted Aceh self-government, which was a compromise between full independence and Indonesian rule.

Because Aceh was heavily damaged in the disaster, it received assistance from several humanitarian organisations, such as UNESCO and the Red Cross. The Acehnese saw the disaster as a warning or a test sent by God [Christoplos and Wu 2012; Kloos 2018]. Despite suspending their bid for independence and engaging in peace talks with the Indonesian government, many Acehnese had continued to engage in acts of war and violence. It was in response to such behaviour, the Acehnese concluded, that God had intervened and sent the disaster, and so the disaster became a cause for repentance.

On the other hand, the disaster also stoked a mood of optimism. The idea was that if the disaster were a God-sent warning or test, humbly accepting this warning or test would yield blessings in the future. The blessings were to come in the form of socioeconomic development and an improvement in moral/religious standards. The assistance of overseas aid workers led to some visible improvements in Aceh [Feener 2013: 52–54, Samuels 2016: 25–28]. For example, the Acehnese started seeing the latest automobiles on the roads and a number of air-conditioned shopping malls. Having witnessed these improvements, the Acehnese started describing the disaster as a turning point in Aceh's development, and it was after the disaster that the Acehnese started pursuing a better material standard of living.

However, because they saw the disaster as a warning or test, the Acehnese understood that the bright future would not come without conditions. Socioeconomic development was conditional upon the Acehnese laying down their arms and cooperating with the Indonesian government and foreigners. Moral

and religious improvement, on the other hand, was conditional upon the Acehnese changing their ways. The population sought a more God-fearing approach, and the Acehnese government, for its part, started promoting an Islamic society. 'Shari'a-compliant rule,' aiming to protect religion, spirit, reason, children, and possession, is the basic way for it [Muhibbuththabary 2010: 27].

2. Concept of *Hisbah* Police and its Activities

Aceh's 2000 provincial law provides for the creation of a *Hisbah* police force in Aceh (Article I [General Provisions], Paragraph 5).²³ The 2002 and 2003 versions of the law stipulate the purpose of the *Hisbah* police's activities as follows [Abubakar 2009: 23–26, 28]:

The Wilayatul Hisbah Police Unit is responsible for supervising the practice of Islamic shari'a.

2002 Province Law, Article 1 (General Provisions), Paragraph 11.

The Wilayatul Hisbah Police Unit is responsible for admonishing, guiding, and supervising Muslims in enjoining good and forbidding wrong [amar makruf nahi mungkar], and it conducts inspections for such a purpose.

2003 Province Law, Article 1 (General Provisions), Paragraph 11

Initially, however, the *Hisbah* police focused on anti-crime operations and lacked the authority to investigate suspected violations. As such, for the first few years since they were officially established in 2000, the *Hisbah* police were not independent, and they existed only in Banda Aceh. In December 2004, however, the *Hisbah* police started expanding their organisation from Banda Aceh, setting up branches throughout the province. In 2009, they merged with the security forces and increased their authority [Otto and Michiel 2016: 190–191].

Their operations now target the following

offenses: non-performance of prayers, un-Islamic dress, alcohol consumption, prostitution, adultery, intermingling between the sexes, sodomy, narcotics, and gambling. Most of these offenses are clearly criminalised in the first article (General Provisions) of Aceh's 2016 Criminal Code. Below, I have cited provisions of the law concerning alcohol, sexual propriety, and gambling.²⁴

Alcohol

Article I-21

Alcoholic beverages (khamar) mean intoxicants or beverages with an alcohol by volume of 2% or more.

Article I-37

Dealing in alcohol means producing, preparing, possessing, storing, or exchanging alcoholic beverages.

Sexual propriety

Article I-23

Seclusion (khalwat) means intimacy with a member of the opposite sex, or being alone in a private place with a member of the opposite sex who is not a guardian (mahram) or spouse for consensual fornication.

Article I-24

Intermingling (ikhtilath) means consensual intimate relations, including holding hands, hugging, and kissing, between an unmarried male and female in a private or public place.

Article I-26

Adultery (zina) means consensual sexual intercourse outside of marriage between a man and a woman or more parties.

Article I-27

Sexual harassment (pelecehan seksual) means behaving lasciviously toward someone, regardless of the person's gender, in a public place and without the person's consent.

Article I-28

Sodomy (liwath) means consensual penetrative anal sex between men.

Gambling

Article I-22

Gambling (maisir) means any act that involves an element of gambling or betting between two or more people where the winner receives money or some other specific benefit, either directly or indirectly, from the loser.

As these examples suggest, Aceh's *Hisbah* police's operations are modern-day attempts to discharge *hisba*, similar to the attempts of Saudi Arabia's CPVPV and ISIL's *Hisba* Agency. That said, the more abstract items covered by the CPVPV such as 'moral behaviour' and 'general conduct' are not covered by Aceh's *Hisbah* police.

3. Policing in the cities

What actual operations do the *Hisbah* police conduct?²⁵ Let us look first at the operations in Aceh's capital, Banda Aceh. At the time of my visit to the city in February 2016, Banda Aceh had 75 *Hisbah* police officers. In Banda Aceh, there are frequent reports of 'inappropriate' behaviour between the sexes. As the above examples indicated, there are several offenses under the category of sexual propriety, including seclusion (*khalwat*), intermingling (*ikhtilath*), fornication (*zina*), and sodomy (*liwath*). If the parties are unmarried, the critical issue will be whether there was any bodily contact between them. Otherwise, the critical issue will be whether there was any sexual activity between them. If a young man and woman were holding hands in the city centre or enjoying a meal and a chat in one of the city's cafés, they probably would not be arrested by the *Hisbah* police. However, if they were meeting in a secluded or dimly lit place, the *Hisbah* police would deem this 'inappropriate' contact and might arrest them on suspicion of engaging in sexual activity. The *Hisbah* police patrol dimly lit suburban streets and harbours after dusk. They also inspect each hotel, checking the IDs of couples sharing a room. If they find that the couple are neither married nor related by blood, they will deem the couple 'inappropriate' and make an arrest. As for prostitution, the *Hisbah* police inspect salons in suburban neighbourhoods, and if they find evidence of



Figure 5. Patrol vehicle of WH in Banda Aceh.

sexual services, they will expose the facility and arrest the owner and staff.

In Pidie Regency, an administrative division adjoining Banda Aceh, the *Hisbah* police unit in the city of Sigli consists of 30 officers, including both men and women. The main cases they deal with involve gambling and liaisons between unmarried people. Regarding the latter, the patrols are concentrated around the coast, as in Banda Aceh. In

Sigli, plainclothes officers called *muhtasib* covertly spy on local neighbourhoods and report back to the police unit. According to the police's data (See Table 6-1, 2), there are relatively few violations of public morals (based on the arrest figures), although alcohol consumption is somewhat prevalent. However, arrests have been steadily climbing in recent years, and in 2017, the Sigli *Hisbah* police recorded the first-ever case of fornication in the municipality since *Hisbah* policing began. The police officers take this as a sign that public morals have started deteriorating.

The *Hisbah* police unit in Lhokseumawe, a town situated south of Sigli, consists of 40 officers, both men and women. The patrols of this police unit primarily cover the coast and the town's hotels, salons, and cafés. Most of the arrests it makes are for cases of seclusion and alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption in Lhokseumawe is related to another issue: smuggling. Lhokseumawe is vulnerable to smuggling because it is situated close to the province of North Sumatra and because there are no checkpoints on the

Table 6-1. Statistics of investigation in Sigli, 2016

Activities	Number of times	Number of subjects	Contents
Regular patrol	1,082	673 people	Advice, warning and guidance
Officials	48	136 people	Advice, warning and guidance
Students	156	340 people	Advice and extradition to schools
Street vendors	104	53 shops	Warning and removal
Concerning building permit	24	87 ridges	Advice, warning and removal
Coffee shops	61	101 people	Advice, warning and arrest
Beauty salons and hotels	52	27 people	Advice, warning and arrest
Touristic sites and parks	50	77 people	Advice, warning and arrest
Cattle houses	132	69 cows and 211 goats	Warning and fine
Dinas Shari'a	96	646 people	Advice, warning and arrest
Special patrol for holidays	18	42 people	Advice and guidance

Table 6-2. Statistics of arrests from 2014 to 2017 in Sigli.

Case	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	cases	people	cases	people	cases	people	cases	people
Alcohol (<i>khawar</i>)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gamble (<i>maisir</i>)	2	24	6	58	5	33	7	37
Seclusion (<i>khalwat</i>)	0	0	1	2	3	8	0	0
Mingling (<i>Ikhtilath</i>)	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	4
Adultery (<i>zina</i>)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2

provincial border.²⁶ Another municipality with a smuggling problem is Langsa, which is even closer to North Sumatra. The Langsa *Hisbah* police unit consists of 61 officers, of whom 52 are men and nine are women. They concern themselves mainly with alcohol consumption, gambling (e.g., poker games), fornication, and seclusion. The officers say that they have seen a spike in nighttime music festivals, something that never used to be a local custom. They say that musical festivals are a cultural import from North Sumatran cities such as Medan.

The situation is somewhat different for *Hisbah* police forces in locales that, while close to North Sumatra Province, are relatively far from Medan and other North Sumatran cities. One such example is the 28-officer-strong police force of Singkil, which is situated on the west side of the island of Sumatra. According to these officers, since Singkil is separated from Medan by mountains, there is less of an influx of what they see as unsavoury culture.

As in the Sigli unit, the *Hisbah* police units of Langsa Singkil also deploy plainclothes officers to spy on the public. These officers, whom the police describe as ‘intel’, are small in number, but they contribute significantly to policing by photographing and reporting moonshining facilities and gambling dens.

4. *Hisbah* Police and the People

As with the religious police of Saudi Arabia and ISIL, Aceh’s religious police focus on everyday moral matters such as alcohol, sexual propriety, and the like. In comparison to the other two cases, however, Aceh’s religious police are generally more lenient. For example, the police do not enforce strict dress codes for women or crack down on entertainment such as musical performances. How is Aceh’s religious policing viewed by members of the public?

The *Hisbah* police detain suspects for up a maximum of 15 days. The suspects are then tried and sentenced in a *shari’a* court. However, the only corporal sentence a *shari’a* court can impose is caning, and such sentences are carried out using a rattan cane

and without inflicting serious injuries. In March 2017, a Chinese Buddhist man was arrested for arranging cockfights. The suspect chose to be tried and sentenced in a *shari’a* court. The provincial criminal code provides that non-Muslims can choose whether to be tried in a *shari’a* or secular court, and most opt for the secular court. Reportedly, the Buddhist man opted for *shari’a* over secular justice because under *shari’a* justice, he could get the sentence over and done with quicker.

As light as caning sentences may be, getting arrested and detained by the *Hisbah* police is not without its disadvantages. What people dread the most is public exposure. Photos of the accused and their crimes can appear in the newspapers as early as the next day. This happens most frequently in adultery cases. In such cases, the personal identities of the man and woman, as well as the families to which they belong, become widely known throughout the neighbourhood. Public exposure can wreak havoc in the person’s life, and there have been cases where students were expelled or employees were fired. Then, after receiving the sentence, the person often becomes the target of unwelcome attention, and family members sometimes get slandered too [Otto and Michiel 2016: 202].²⁷

As for those Acehnese who stay on the right side of the law, they seem to be somewhat dismissive of the *Hisbah* police. Such an attitude might be related to the *Hisbah* police’s qualifications, or lack thereof. According to what these individuals say, officers in



Figure 6. Police station cell of WH in Sigli.

senior roles tend to be relatively well educated and well versed in Islam and *shari'a*, but the same cannot be said of the rank-and-file patrol officers. It is true that the *Hisbah* recruit individuals who studied Islam at university and require them to take a written and interview test. However, the *Hisbah* police are poorly paid compared to those in a conventional police force or in other public posts, and the more talented a *Hisbah* police officer is, the more likely it is that he or she will leave for another job. Consequently, many young Acehnese, for instance, do not see the *Hisbah* police as a particular nuisance or source of concern, provided that they do not interfere with leisure activities, such as social networking on a smartphone or watching a football match in a café.

However, older Acehnese with memories of the civil conflict, disaster, and recovery effort are more likely to emphasise how the *Hisbah* police do indeed wield authority and that they have helped maintain public order during a period of social change. Such individuals are less likely to regard the *Hisbah* police as an undesirable or unwarranted force.

The Acehnese people's lack of hostility toward the *Hisbah* police might also be related to the fact that it is relatively easy to give them the slip. Because the *Hisbah* police's jurisdiction is limited to Aceh, one can evade their grip simply by crossing the provincial border. A fugitive could catch a flight from Banda Aceh and arrive in Medan in North Sumatra within the hour. Alternatively, he or she could go by bus, which would take around 10 hours. In the case of Saudi Arabia, fugitives would need to leave the country. In the case of ISIL, they would need to somehow escape the territory at great risk to their lives. The religious police in Aceh do not have such a stranglehold over the people. The *Hisbah* police's operations are a major fixture of Acehnese daily life, but they do not completely dominate it.

V. Conclusion

'Promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' is a *Qur'an*'s imperative for mutual surveillance among the Muslim society, whereby fellow Muslims encourage each other to perform their obligations and refrain from forbidden acts. Religious police are public officials who ensure that Muslims are performing their obligations and refraining from forbidden acts pursuant to this imperative. In this article, I discussed how such religious police enforce public morals in the Muslim world today, focusing on three cases (Saudi Arabia, ISIL, and Aceh).

Each case involved a different type of actor: a state, a jihadist group, and a state's administrative division. The three cases also varied in terms of the degree to which the religious police has been institutionalised and the extent of their authority. However, as I mentioned at the start, one commonality is that each actor emerged with the self-determined decision to build a society based on Islamic values. It was to such an end that each actor selected religious policing as the means. In this respect, rather than treating religious police and their operations as institutions of particular states or regions, we should consider them to be vital clues about the broader zeitgeist of the Muslim world today, including the Islamic revival and the spread of Islamism.

However, in doing so, we should not ignore the particularities of each actor. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom has been re-examining the CPVPV's role and purpose as it navigates between Wahhabism and the recent social reforms. In other words, Saudi Arabia's religious police provide vital insights for understanding the conflict between tradition and modernity. In the case of ISIL, in addition to its role in fostering a Muslim society, the *Hisba* Agency also acts as a signal that the non-state actor is maintaining control in the area. As such, it provides a useful barometer of the non-state actor's grip on power. By extension, it can also provide useful reference data for analysing *jihadist* groups that once

pledged loyalty to ISIL. One example is Boko Haram, a jihadist group that continues to exercise control in northern Nigeria today [Kassim and Nwankpa 2018]. As for Aceh, the *Hisbah* police derive their rationale from circumstances unique to Aceh. Specifically, the Acehnese developed a theodicy to explain why God permitted the 2004 disaster, and the *Hisbah* police became a core part of such a narrative. Thus, in analysing religious police, their operations, and the underlying principle of ‘*shari’a* -compliant rule’, we must capture the nuanced circumstances of each case, such as those I noted above. Otherwise, we may end up with a simplistic caricature that portrays religious policing as an example of Islam’s fundamental

incompatibility with modern civilisation. It is out of a desire to discourage such lazy caricatures that I have sought in this article to illustrate the academic value of studying religious police and their operations.

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NOTES

- 1 Q3 (Āl ‘Imrān): 104. There are some other holy verses often cited for the explanation of ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice,’ such as “The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They promote virtue and prevent vice, and establish prayer and give *zakāt* (almsgiving) and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise (al-Tawba: 71),” “O my son, establish prayer, promote virtue, prevent vice, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination (Luqmān: 17).” These verses implicate the significance of ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ as it is compared with basic duties such as prayer and *zakāt*.
- 2 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, etc.
- 3 This book, alongside of the book of Abū Ya‘lā Muḥammad ibn al-Farrā’ (990–1066) with the same title, has been broadly read and adopted as a classical work of the institutionalization of ‘promotion of virtue and prevention of vice,’ including the cases which this paper explains latter.
- 4 Although the Committee is a governmental body under the direct control of the Royal Court, with the formal name as “General Presidency of the Committee of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*al-Ri’āsa al-Āmma li-Hay’a al-Amr bi-l-Ma’rūf wa-n-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar*),” the Committee is in general called just as “the Committee of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV).” Therefore, this paper also uses this abbreviated name.
- 5 Although the House of Saud conquered the large part of the Arabian Peninsula until early 19th century, the first state fell because of the assault by the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Muḥammad ‘Alī (1769–1849, r. 1805–1848). The second state was destroyed by the attack of the House of Rashīd, a rival tribe based in northern Najd.
- 6 This character is particularly prominent in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, the main book of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb [al-Ibrāhīm 2011].
- 7 The House of Saud won the battle against the governor of Makka, Sharīf Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (1853–1931), and captured the holy city in 1924, Madina and Jidda in 1925, then established present territory in 1932.
- 8 These scholars had been contributing for building the society based on Wahhabism, by consulting several possible policies in the early days of Saudi Arabia. As for other scholars, although the names of ‘Umar ibn Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ishāq, ‘Abd al-Latīf ibn Ibrāhīm are seen in the document, but their detailed careers are not known [CPVPV 2009/10b: 32].
- 9 At the same year, the first official establishment of Islamic scholars in the country, the House of Legal Opinions and Supervision of Religious Affairs (*Dār al-Iftā wa-l-Isbrāf ‘alā al-Shu‘ūn al-Dīniya*) was established [Al Atawneh 2010: 8]. This was restructured by dividing into two religious agencies newly established in 1971; the Council of Senior Ulema and the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Legal Opinions (*al-Lajna al-Dā’ima li-l-Buḥūth al-‘Ilmiya wa-l-Iftā*), then the former had become the highest ranked religious body, by assuming a role to form the official discourse of Islam in the

country through issuing legal opinions. That the Committee was officially established before these organizations was nothing less than its demand for the process of order formation in the country after the establishment of country. The Committee was formed as present General Presidency in 1976, led by 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd Allāh as the ministerial-level chief.

- 10 In fact, the Committee collaborated on security-related patrol with police after 1930s.
- 11 However, these actions were not always regarded as adequate to promote 'change' including female empowerment [Al-Rasheed 2015].
- 12 Perhaps the most notorious case was the CPVPV's response to the 2002 girls' school fire in Makka. In March 2002, a girls' school in Makka caught fire and 15 girls died. In Saudi Arabia, schoolgirls and schoolboys are segregated and study in separate buildings. Because schoolgirls should in principle have no contact with males during the school day, they are allowed to remove their hijab and abaya and wear their own clothes. According to reports, even though the school was ablaze, the CPVPV prevented girls from leaving the building in their own clothes and prevented male firefighters from entering the building. The CPVPV's callous response attracted fierce criticism. A more recent case occurred in 2012. In the mountainous Bāḥa province, a married couple suffered a car crash after being chased by the CPVPV. One of the two individuals died in the crash. The CPVPV had wrongly assumed that the couple were unmarried and had asked the couple for identification. The couple refused to show any identification and fled. The CPVPV then gave chase, which caused the couple's car to crash. Some may wonder why the couple refused to show their identification, as this would have easily demonstrated their married status. However, a major focus of the media reports was the criticism of the CPVPV's heavy-handedness. It seems that public attention was focused less on the specific details of the case and more on how the CPVPV's patrols were inappropriate, mistaken, and violent.
- 13 Examples include the *Hisba* Conference and the Conference for Strengthening Values and Morals, both held in 2010, and the Conference on the CPVPV and Society, held in 2011 [CPVPV 2010; 2010/11].
- 14 'Ukāz, 15 Jan., 2012, p. 2.
- 15 *Arab News*, 15 Jan., 2012, p. 3.
- 16 'Volunteers' mean those who had patrolled in the cities just like the official member of the Committee. Their patrol had been often criticized by the people because they had not been always received enough training for policing. Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz declared that the patrol of policing public morality is operated only by the official member of the Committee from then onward, after expressing his gratitude for volunteers. *al-Waṭan*, 16 Jan., 2012, p. 3.
- 17 Especially to the abolition of volunteer's patrol, some people voiced a complaint as "Promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' is not the duty which only the Committee assumes!" It showed people's built-up frustration against a privilege of certain governmental body. *Saudi Gazette*, 16 Jan., 2012, p. 3.
- 18 Attacks of holy shrines and killing clerics in Najaf in August 2003 and March 2004, and beheading American and Japanese hostages in October 2004 are still fresh memories. By the way, in recognition of these militant operations, Usāma bin Lādin (1957–2011) received accepted the pledges of allegiance of al-Zarqāwī, and the military operations of al-Zarqāwī had become developed in the name of al-Qā'ida.
- 19 There were militants from Syria among the groups under al-Qā'ida wings. They were the members of Muslim Brotherhood in Syria those who fought with Ba'th regime between 1960s–80s, defeated, left the country, and trained in Afghanistan. For them, instability in Syria because of 'Arab spring' and return to Syria were the special opportunity for their vengeance against the Syrian regime [Moubayed 2015: 41].
- 20 For example, a number of reports presented footage of al-Baghdādī's speeches, revealing that he was wearing an expensive Rolex wristwatch [al-Arabiya English 2014b]. These reports sought to show that al-Baghdādī was far from a man of modest means and that he was in fact a nouveau riche type with a penchant for flashy Western accessories. The intention was to make him seem less threatening and more ridiculous in the eyes of non-Muslims, and less authoritative and imposing in the eyes of Muslims. In the same vein, various allegations were made online about how al-Baghdādī supposedly drank alcohol and how the online reports of his academic credentials were all false.
- 21 Under the governance of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam (1496–1904), the Islamization of Aceh had been promoted especially after the conversion of ruling elites to Muslim. Then, under the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1583?–1636, r. 1607–1636), the Kingdom was at the height of its power, covering the most part of Sumatra [Siegel 2000: 36–37]. However, because of Dutch invasion to Sumatra since 18th century, the Kingdom ended its history in 1903, by the abdication of Muhammad Dawud Shah (1864–1939, r. 1874–1903).

- 22 What provided a spark to it was natural gas development in 1970s. In the process of the development in Indonesia, the Arun gas field in Aceh discovered in 1971 occupied an important role. The gas power plant had released wastewater that damaged human health and farm land, besides the inequality of revenue between Indonesian government and Aceh. Therefore, on the background of combustion toward the government, the people in Aceh established GAM in 1976, and rose up again. Soeharto (1921–2008, presidency: 1967–1998), appointed as the second president of Indonesia in 1967, suppressed the revolt through the armed force, his biggest support base. That led to exile, arrest and execution of the part of member the GAM.
- 23 The official name of religious police in Aceh is the Unit of Provincial Police and *Wilayatul Hisbah* of Aceh (Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja dan Wilayatul Hisbah Aceh). The people in Aceh generally abbreviate it to '*Wilayatul Hisbah*', or just '*WH*' (wei-hā).
- 24 See the Aceh's provincial official site. <http://acehprov.go.id/index.html>.
- 25 The descriptions of the *Hisbah* Police's operations in the article are mainly based on my interviews with the *Hisbah* Police branches in each city.
- 26 In the past, there were checkpoints along the provincial border, and they would confiscate alcohol alongside other duties, such as checking for narcotics and human trafficking. However, because the checkpoints entailed high personnel costs and because their operations resulted in traffic congestion, the scope of their operations was reduced around the year 2007 to inspecting long-distance buses only, and eventually, the checkpoints were removed altogether.
- 27 The provincial decree prohibiting public punishment by the *Hisbah* Police was issued on April 2018. However, as it faced opposition from some part, public punishment is still seen in some cities.

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